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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004881

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/19/2025

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH CLASSICAL LIBERALS CRITICIZE AUTHORITARIAN
DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY

REF: ANKARA 2030

Classified By: POLCOUNS John Kunstadter; E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) POLOFFS met with Dr. Atilla Yayla, professor of political theory and political economy at Gazi University and the president of the Association for Liberal Thinking (LDT). Yayla is a genuine classical liberal, i.e. an advocate of religious freedom, freedom of thought, market economics, property rights, and the rule of law. He is fond of writers like John Locke, Adam Smith, F.A. Hayek, and Ludwig Von Mises.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR LIBERAL THINKING (LDT)

2. (C) LDT was started in 1992 and became an official organization in 1994. Its focus is on promoting liberal ideas in Turkey. LDT publishes academic journals and books and hosts academic conferences. It also tries to translate various liberal, economic, and legal works into Turkish. LDT provides some financial support and internship-type opportunities for a few students. The Association has a very professional looking internet page in English and Turkish (www.liberal.org.tr). LDT does not wish to form a political party and generally steers clear of partisan politics; however, Atilla's assistant also mentioned that they have sometimes done policy and strategy consulting work for various political parties.

3. (C) The LDT is housed in two modest flats in a building in central Ankara. The rooms are plain and lack air conditioning. When POLOFFs visited, there were perhaps a dozen college age students in the building working in small offices with computers. LDT has a small library. Yayla asserted that LDT has received some funding from the EU and the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy.

TURKEY'S MIXED REGIME: DEMOCRATIC AND AUTHORITARIAN

4. (C) Yayla admits classical liberals are very rare in Turkey, a country that suffers from overwhelming authoritarianism. Turkey, according to Yayla, is a partially democratic and partially authoritarian country. Turkey is partially democratic because it has had relatively free and fair elections since 1950, but this democratic electoral process is laid on top of a highly authoritarian political culture. There have been four military coups (1960, 1971, 1980, and the post-modern coup in 1997). Yayla also stated that Turkish institutions --- universities, large businesses, the press, the military, the state bureaucracies, and the political parties --- are highly authoritarian in their structure, behavior, ideology, and preferences. Turkey's political parties, for example, may all have different ideologies (e.g. left-of-center, right-of-center, nationalist, or Islamist), but they all want to win elections to take control of the state and then use it to implement their ideology in an authoritarian fashion.

5. (C) Yayla went on to assert that there are two "official religions" in Turkey --- laic Sunni Islam and Kemalist statism --- and both of are authoritarian. There is limited freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion. There is tremendous social and professional pressure to conform and people are not free to openly challenge Sunni Islam or the Kemalist state. The educational system, the bureaucracy, and the military, moreover, reinforce this authoritarianism.

6. (C) Comment. Yayla's analysis is accurate, but his views are all too rare in Turkey, especially among the political elite. Turkey has a democratic electoral system, but the country's political, social, and familial structures are highly authoritarian. Turkey, moreover, does not deserve the reputation some give it for being the home of a moderate version of Islam (REFTEL). Turkish political parties --- especially the governing pro-Islam Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the ostensibly liberal center-right

Motherland Party (ANAP) --- sometimes give lip service to liberalism, but they are all internally undemocratic, intolerant of dissent, and, as Yayla and many others have pointed out, driven by the goal of capturing the state to use it for their own personal (i.e. financial) and ideological purposes. End Comment.
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